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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000772

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TAGS: MY PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH OPPOSITION LEADER ANWAR

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 529

Classified By: Ambassador James R. Keith for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a meeting at the Embassy on September 14, opposition coalition Peoples Alliance (PR) leader Anwar Ibrahim told the Ambassador that, in line with reports in the blogosphere, he had met with Prime Minister Najib Razak alone for about two hours in early August. Najib had said that Anwar's trial was out of his hands and in the courts; Anwar disagreed. Anwar said Najib expressed repeated concern about allegations that he was connected with the 2006 death of Mongolian model Altantuya Shaariibuu. Anwar also touched on plans for the opposition coalition Peoples Alliance to create a joint platform, and previewed his plans to travel to the U.S. in early October, when he will meet with senior USG officials and prominent private citizens, including former President Clinton and former Vice President Gore. END SUMMARY.

ANWAR - PM NAJIB MEETING

¶2. (C) Anwar Ibrahim, 62, is Chairman of the Peoples Justice Party (PKR), a member of Parliament from Penang, former ruling party member and Deputy Prime Minister (1993-98), and currently leader of the opposition coalition Peoples Alliance (PR in Malaysian), formed between the three main opposition parties after their strong showing in the March 2008 elections. In a September 14 meeting with the Ambassador and PolCouns, Anwar volunteered that he met Prime Minister Najib Razak in early August, as had been reported in the blogosphere. Anwar said he had initially asked Najib to meet with all three heads of the PR parties: Anwar (although his wife Wan Azizah is technically head of the PKR), Hadi Awang, President of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) and Karpal Singh, President of the Democratic Action Party (DAP). Najib declined, particularly objecting to including Singh in such a meeting, but Anwar was still working on the idea. The Ambassador commented that he thought such a meeting would be a good idea, especially if its occurrence could be made public to help solidify the idea that Malaysia's politics now included as a permanent feature a need for ruling party/opposition dialogue.

¶3. (C) Anwar said the one-on-one meeting with Najib lasted two hours. The mood was stiff to begin with, but Anwar came away satisfied that Najib had treated him with the respect due to an opposition party leader. Najid had told Anwar that there was nothing he could do about Anwar's pending sodomy charges (ref A), saying that the matter was with the courts. Anwar told the Ambassador that he had replied to Najib that he was like an emperor who could do what he wanted to determine the outcome. Anwar indicated that he did not expect Najib to take action on his behalf, and for that reason had resisted Najib's offers to meet again since the August meeting. He made no prediction about the course of his sodomy trial except to say that proceedings would be delayed for at least two months.

¶4. (C) Anwar said Najib referred "three times" to concerns about continuing allegations that Najib was involved in the

2006 death of Mongolian model Altantuya Shaariibuu, rumored to have been his mistress, whose body was blown up with explosives in a remote area. Najib had said that questions from the media about the case made it difficult for him to travel abroad. He criticized Anwar for having mentioned the case. (Note: Anwar joined 80 other opposition members of Parliament in April 2009 in signing a letter to Malaysia's King urging that Najib's appointment as Prime Minister be delayed until an independent commission could determine whether he was involved in Shaariibuu's death and consider other allegations of misconduct. End Note.) Anwar said he had replied that he only saw fit to mention the case after Shaariibuu's father had visited him and presented a long list of points and unanswered questions about her death. Anwar said he had also told Najib that he was fortunate that more information was not public, and, when Najib had asked what he could do about the situation, had urged Najib to do the right thing.

MALAYSIA'S IMAGE

¶ 5. (C) Anwar said that the caning sentence imposed on a Muslim woman showed Malaysia's hypocrisy, since many Muslims, including sultans, regularly drank alcoholic drinks. A further problem was the Syari'a law did not provide a mechanism for administering the punishment. He said the August 28 "cow head incident," when a group of Muslims demonstrated against the relocation of a Hindu temple by carrying and stepping on a severed cow's head, showed that Malaysia's atmosphere was "ugly." In the 1980s, he said, a Hindu temple had been desecrated and all communities spoke

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out firmly against the deed; this time the Home Minister (Hishamuddin Hussein) met with the demonstrators and came to an understanding that there would be no arrests. The later arrests were only because of the public backlash. His one comment on the economy was that Bank Negara information, which he received as a courtesy as a former finance minister, showed the GOM budget would face shortfalls in early 2010 because of overspending now.

¶ 6. (C) Anwar said he wanted democracy to take hold in Malaysia, so that it could be an example to the rest of the Muslim world. During a recent visit to Jeddah, businessmen and officials had told him privately that progress toward open democracy in Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey was an important for the Middle East. He lamented that the Malaysian judiciary, which "used to be respected," had deteriorated. Unprompted, he added that the International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) were doing a great job promoting democracy in Malaysia.

PEOPLES ALLIANCE

¶ 7. (C) Anwar touched briefly on a three-hour meeting earlier on September 14 that he held with his coalition partners, PAS's Hadi and DAP's Singh. He said that he had told the two to resolve discord in Selangor -- one of the five states, and Malaysia's wealthiest, that the PR coalition has governed since its March 2008 election victory there -- over the sale of alcohol, referring to a controversy that arose after a PAS official ordered Selangor stores to stop selling beer. Asked whether it was a challenge keeping the coalition in line, Anwar said it was not easy but did not elaborate. (Note: Media reports said that the PR agreed on September 14 to issue a common political platform in December. End Note.)

U.S. VISIT

¶ 8. (C) Anwar thanked the Ambassador for the Embassy's issuance of new visa to him, indicating he planned to visit

several parts of the U.S. in early October and would meet former President Clinton, former Vice President Gore and was hoping to meet State and NSC officials in Washington. He planned to return to Malaysia in time for the next by-election in Bagan Pinang, in the State of Negeri Sembilan, on October 11. (Note: The PR has won seven of eight by-elections since the March 2008 general election, but the ruling National Front coalition is widely expected to win this next race. End Note.)

KEITH